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S E C R E T TEGUCIGALPA 002162

SIPDIS

STATE FOR S/CT, DS, INR, EB/TRA, WHA, AND WHA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/11/2013

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SUBJECT: POSSIBLE AL-QAIDA AVIATION THREAT TO THE U.S.

(S/ES 200322654)

REF: STATE 258046

1. (S) Post demarched key GOH officials in several ministries September 10 with reftel information concerning a possible Al-Qaida aviation threat to the U.S.:

-- PolOff delivered reftel talking points to MFA Director General for Foreign Affairs Mario Fortin who said he would immediately forward the information to the Ministry of the Presidency. Fortin emphasized that Honduras would do whatever it could to assist the U.S. in the war against terrorism.

-- EconOff delivered reftel talking points to Cesar Vasquez, Director of Civil Aviation. Vasquez emphasized that Honduran aviation authorities are already operating at a level of heightened security awareness, and asked if there were specific actions that the USG was requesting. EconOff reiterated that officials should review their current security posture, specifically with regard to flights which might be used in the kind of attacks described. The issue will be discussed further with visiting TSA Representative Victor Guardia at an airport security meeting already planned for September 11th. (Note: In addition to direct flights to Houston and Miami (daily) and New Orleans (four times a week), the following commercial aircraft depart Honduras: an Airbus 320 daily to El Salvador, a Boeing 737 twice a week to Nicaragua, and a Boeing 737 daily to Costa Rica. A chartered flight also flies once or twice a month from the island of Roatan to Milan, Italy. There are no direct commercial flights from Honduras to Canada or Europe. End Note.)

-- Law Enforcement Program Coordinator delivered reftel talking points to Minister of Public Security Oscar Alvarez. Alvarez said he would order increased checkpoints in border regions, placing extra emphasis on travelers' origin, destinations, and travel documents. He also plans to meet with airport officials to place extra security measures at international airports in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula. He will place U.S.-trained Frontier Police at airport boarding gates to do random questioning and searches, and will encourage airlines to advise the Frontier Police when a suspicious person or persons with suspicious travel plans purchase tickets or check-in.

2. (S) The Ambassador is seeking a meeting with President Ricardo Maduro to discuss this and other issues. President Maduro returned September 10 from a short trip to the U.S.

3. (S) Minister Alvarez also said that he has stepped up police protection for the U.S. and British Embassies from now through the weekend, due to the 9/11 anniversary.
PALMER